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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000168

SENSITIVE  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PROP](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: POLITICAL TEMPERATURE IN CHIANG MAI ON THE RISE

REF: A. BANGKOK 3280 (X-PM THAKSIN ADDRESSES)  
    B. CHIANG MAI 147 (PM'S VISIT)  
    C. CHIANG MAI 145 (VIOLENT CLASH)  
    D. BANGKOK 2546 (PAD PROTESTS CHALLENGE)

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Sensitive but unclassified; please handle accordingly.

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Summary and Comment  
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1. (SBU) Over the past six days, a bombing targeting a key People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) leader, and the siege of the Chiang Mai Thai Public Broadcasting Service station by pro-government supporters have upped the political tension in Chiang Mai. Though the bomb did not injure anyone, and the siege ended after nearly 12 hours, contacts tell us they expect there will be more unrest in the coming months, and the police expressed frustration at their inability to prosecute supporters of the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD).

2. (SBU) Comment: These incidents, and those described in Refs B and C, underline the tension that exists between opposing political groups, not just in Bangkok, but in the government's stronghold in northern Thailand. They also highlight the ends to which these groups are willing to go to get their point across. With the upcoming ASEAN Summit due to take place in Chiang Mai next month, the reported impunity of the UDD, and the social conflicts at the heart of Thailand's political instability unlikely to be resolved anytime in the near future, we should expect these incidents not to be the last of their kind. End Summary and Comment.

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UDD Seizes TV Station Over Allegations of Bribes to Join Rally  
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3. (U) On the morning of Sunday, November 2, the Thai Public Broadcasting Service aired a report alleging that participants from Chiang Mai in the November 1 rally in Bangkok addressed by former Prime Minister Thaksin (Ref A) had been paid to attend. In response, members of the "Love Chiang Mai 51" group of the UDD, the same group that clashed with the PAD several weeks ago (Ref C), stormed TPBS' Chiang Mai affiliate on November 3 shortly before noon. Some of the 100 protestors were armed with bamboo poles and steel pipes. They broke through the outer perimeter of the grounds, and surrounded all the inner exits to the building, though they did not/not enter it.

4. (U) Twice during the siege, provincial and local police authorities unsuccessfully tried to secure the UDD's agreement

to allow the women and children inside the TPBS station to leave. The UDD refused to let anyone depart the premises until they had an audience with the TPBS national director, whom they wanted to come to Chiang Mai for the meeting. Instead, he sent the chief political news editor. After several hours of negotiations, the stand-off ended when TPBS agreed to release a public statement apologizing to the members of "Love Chiang Mai 51" who were affected by Sunday's report, and who attended the rally voluntarily. As part of the settlement, the TPBS Director also agreed to make a similar statement on-air, which he did at 11:00 pm on Monday November 3, and again on the morning of November 4. Furthermore, TPBS agreed not to press charges for trespassing and other offenses against the UDD.

15. (U) Contacts confirmed to us on Tuesday November 4 that TPBS' Chiang Mai affiliate resumed only partial operations today out of concern for the safety of staff, some of whom are working at the TPBS building, with the rest working out of an unspecified location elsewhere in the city. Meanwhile, the pro-Thaksin community radio station in Chiang Mai broadcast vocal criticism of what it calls TPBS' "insincere" apology, and hinted at unspecified action to follow-up on yesterday's siege, which did not end until the TPBS director broadcast his apology at 11:00 pm on Monday, Nov. 3. These contacts also told us that although UDD supporters are no longer present at TPBS, the tents they erected on November 3 in anticipation of a more prolonged stand-off are still up.

16. (SBU) The Vice Governor involved in the negotiations told us he was concerned that there would be more unrest to come. Separately, police contacts told us they are frustrated by their inability to take action against the UDD, particularly when PAD supporters who seized a pro-government television station in August (Ref D) were arrested and tried. (Note: The local UDD groups reportedly enjoy the backing of high-level regional police officials.)

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Bombing Targets PAD  
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17. (SBU) Separately, a bomb exploded on the evening of Wednesday, October 29, severely damaging a car belonging to the owner of the local pro-PAD community radio station -- the same station that was involved in the violent clash between PAD and UDD supporters several weeks ago (Ref C). Initial evidence collected by the police indicates the bombing may have been staged, but it is still too early to tell. We will continue to monitor both this investigation and any follow-up to Monday's siege of TPBS.

18. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.  
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